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Myths and Buildings of Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv, a paradox?

In this city of denuded concrete, where the unpleasantness of apparent ugliness always yields to the delights of a stroll, a delight that is more readily associated with more picturesque cities, the question that arises is how to account for this antinomy: how is it that Tel Aviv, such a decrepit city, so disparaged esthetically, can generate so much urbanity? How can a stroll by buildings with their loggias walled up with plastic shutters, facades elevated by hastily built additional stories, walls studded with the fans of air-conditioning units, stilt columns entombed in breeze block, still engender pleasant memories? This question presents even more sharply if one thinks on the contrary of the peculiar sensations of void experienced when touring old neighborhoods like the ones in Jaffa that were expensively renovated. Although entirely restored, repaved and spruced up, they generate no sensation, scant emotion, no sense of place. Here lies one of the crucial questions in city planning: what are the features that make for the 'success' of a city? This is probably the question all researchers in the field of urban history must grapple with. Through the study of spatial, social and architectural development, the goal is to find the keys to what make people like a city or hate it, by plunging into the process of its making. This analysis also calls for exploring the culture, the land, and the political situations that affected city growth. Tel Aviv is particularly suited for this type of study. First of all, it presents itself as a clearly identifiable corpus in time and space. It was founded as an independent entity, in 1909, on the dunes to the North-East of Jaffa and expanded during the Mandate period, spreading northwards up to the Yarkon River, westward to the sea, and eastward up to what is now the Ayalon highway. Secondly, this corpus is the result of both an interweaving of tensions with the local situation, and specific external ties: the city was imagined and built by groups of immigrants, vectors of architectural and urban thinking trained in Europe and driven by explicit societal planning on a land already carved up by conflicts. Lastly, Tel Aviv has been promoted and written about internationally, which facilitates an analysis of its image in the collective imagination and the disparities with historical reality revealed through scientific analysis**.**

In the publications of the *Keren Hayesod* (Palestine Foundation Fund)[1] from the beginning of the century[2] up to a series of articles published in 1994 for a conference on International Style Architecture held in Tel Aviv[3] and including drawings by Nahum Gutman depicting the beginnings of the city and Isaac Kalter's photographs taken in the 1930s, the city resembles a white mirage. Michael Levin's book *White City, International*

[1] Financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded at the Zionist Congress of London in July 1920.
[2] See Tel-Aviv, compiled by Judah Nedivi, Keren Hayesod, 1929.
[3] International Style Architecture Conference, Tel-Aviv, May 22-28, 1994.

Style Architecture in Israel, published in 1984[4] and ten years later the brochure *The White City of Tel Aviv, an Open-Air Museum of the International Style*[5] permanently captured this optical illusion -- the illusion of a city born of the sand, where the pure shapes of more than four thousand buildings, built in the International Style, harmoniously dot spacious avenues, and result from an overall consensus engendered by a shared ideology.

Did this metropolis of more than 350,000 inhabitants, today part of a conurbation that spreads over more than 140 square kilometers, rallye spontaneously emerge fully formed? What realities remain hidden behind this vision that appears more akin to collective fantasy? This is the topic of my doctoral thesis: the goal is to use the archives, analyses of the buildings today and a set of interviews to reconstruct the stages of urban and architectural development of Tel Aviv during the pre-State period, the period ensconced in the heart of today's Tel Aviv.[6]

Following the University Trail

The popular and official version of the history of Tel Aviv has already been altered by various pieces of information and considerations from Israeli university scholars: art historians concerning architecture and geographers as regards urban history. Ziva Sternhell, the art critic for the daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*, has attempted to nuance the architectural corpus of Tel Aviv. Contrasting the vision of a unique, International style as described originally by Michael Levin, she finds a palette of various inspirations that produced a set of buildings related to the De Stijl, Art Deco movements and Expressionism. Although apparently homogenous, to the trained eye the architecture in fact breaks down into multiple styles.[7]

In scientific publications on the history of the city, in particular those by the geographer Gideon Bigger, the issues deal primarily with the topic of the garden-city;[8] namely, the inappropriateness of this type of model selected by the founders of Tel Aviv at the turn of the century is thought to have led to the current fiasco. In his view, as of the 1930s, the city developed like gangrene. This made obsolete the development plan drawn up in 1925 by the Scottish city planner Patrick Geddes, which was also inspired by the idea of the garden-city.[9] Following this cataclysm, the earlier phases of city planning were wiped out and with them, the remains of the utopian urban plan devised by the founding fathers. The city today is, according to Bigger, confusion and disorder.

This analysis coincides on one point with the popular history of Tel Aviv; namely, the idea that the city was born out of a garden suburb, *Ahuzat Bayit*,[10] a small neighborhood

[4] Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv Museum.
[5] Limited edition, 200 copies, published in Tel Aviv and funded by the Amery Group, the Jewish Agency in Israel and UNESCO.
[6] The research mainly involves studying the correspondence and publications of the time deposited in the Zionist Archives, the Tel Aviv municipal archives, the State Archives and at the Museum of the History of Tel Aviv, as well as the complete collection of surveys, plans and urban projects; the interviews are being conducted with the children or grandchildren of the founders and the architects of Tel Aviv.
[7] See Ziva Sternhell, "Obliterating our architectural splendor", in *Ha'aretz*, Friday July 19, 2002, p. B12.
[8] A satellite city characterized by planning, autonomous management, a dense center, diversified residential areas with low density and close ties with green areas and the countryside. This specific urban configuration is considered an application of the first modern urban scientific theories. See E. Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, London, Faber and Faber, 1902.
[9] Patrick Geddes, *Town Planning Report – Jaffa and Tel Aviv*, typed report, Tel Aviv, 1925.
[10] Or "housing estate" according to the name of the company that financed the purchase of the lands.

built to the northeast of Jaffa by a few Jewish families at the beginning of the 20th century. This is the saga described by the first mayor of the city, Meir Dizengoff,[11] one of the founders, and illustrated by the famous snapshot showing the layout of plots in the dunes. On April 11, 1909, sixty families met on the beach and drew lots to determine who got which plot. Using white seashells as tokens and gray ones for names, a boy drew one and a girl the other. With the group of black skirts and top hats lost in the desert under a blinding sun, the photo is extraordinary. It went around the country and to Jewish communities the world over.

A controversy has arisen, however, among some of the descendents of these founding families that challenges the idea of an original neighborhood. For the granddaughter of Akiva Arieh Weiss, another of the founders, her grandfather in his native Poland did not merely imagine either a neighborhood or a district, but from his earliest dreams, a genuine city, a portal to the land of Israel, able to absorb immigrants and give them a livelihood. Akiva Arieh Weiss gave the initial impetus during a meeting at the Jaffa Jewish community center, one evening in August 1906, which led to the founding of *Ahuzat Bayit* and then Tel Aviv. But rivalry with the future first mayor, Meir Dizengoff forced him to retire from public life, leaving for posterity the idea that Tel Aviv would grow like a mushroom from the small garden city of Jaffa, and no one at that time could predict the scope of its later development.

Neither white, nor unadorned, endowed with a less polished history that would appear at first glance, is the real Tel Aviv actually so far from its inspired double? What basis is there for the architectural diversity and urban chaos described by university scholars when official and unofficial history suggests homogeneity and when visiting the city suggests urbanity?

To explain this paradox, it is crucial to conduct a multidisciplinary analysis, paralleling the history of architecture with the urban history of Tel Aviv ; the style of the buildings with the urban layout. This specific comparison is perhaps the most interesting for the city. Whereas the Modern movement in architecture has elsewhere been accused of creating disasters, in particular in the suburbs of large European cities, here on the contrary it engenders a coherent urban setting, made up of true living and public spaces, all extremely lively, blind to the physical decline of the buildings and the deformities caused by the urban renovations of the 1970s (for example lifting Dizengoff Circle above an express way).

Avant-garde architecture and urban familiarity

It is on narrow strips of land, with views at times on alleys sometimes just three meters wide, on small plots divided according to principles derived from the garden-cities, that the "housing machine" conceptualized by Le Corbusier in the twenties in Europe was put to use here.[12] Whereas the avant-garde architects in Europe favored rationalistic urbanism, fighting for sets of housing units clustered in long buildings in rows perpendicular to roads and separated by large green spaces, the Tel Aviv builders

[11] See Meir Dizengoff, *Tel Aviv and its Development*, Tel Aviv, 1935.
[12] Cf. « Charles-Edouard Jeanneret dit Le Corbusier », in : Françoise Choay, *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie*. Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1965, pp. 233-249, and specially p. 237.

designed buildings aligned in the traditional fashion along the side of the roads, according to the master plan drawn up by Patrick Geddes.

The architectural vocabulary used in the thirties was innovative: the columns, shiny and dazzling, surfaces and shaded concavities, terrace roofs, squares and circles and triumphant pergolas belong to modern language. However because of the constraints of city planning, the architects nevertheless produced buildings which preserved a traditional relationship to the environment: these buildings generated external spaces and demonstrated a certain decorum towards public spaces. This was apparent first of all toward the street. Despite the fact that the buildings were away from the street, continuity was preserved by a whole battery of low walls, metal grillwork, and lines of trees planted on the edges of the plots. Secondly, the buildings maintained this relationship to the intersecting squares: dizzying bay windows or the curve of a balcony emphasized angularity. The differentiation between spaces located in front and in back of the buildings was also traditional: the front yards were neat and gardened, the backs were dirty and fruity. This was also true for the hierarchy of the facades: on the street side, they formed a pictorial composition of filled spaces and voids, through grainy, textured plaster that was scraped, brushed, colored or crackled. In the back, simple plaster was used and the apertures were purely functional. The city is still composed of streets and squares, boulevards and dead-ends, cleverly arranged for the convenience and enjoyment of city life. The main streets are boulevards of sand and palm trees, the smaller roads are "home-ways of vineyard and olive trees"[13], the squares are ordered. The urban syntax remains classic, harking back to the original garden city. The buildings are aligned along the main routes downtown, in separate blocks separated by semi-private dead-ends. The alternation of cubes and bushes characterizes the streets of Tel Aviv of the 1930s. Its urbanity comes first of all from the rhythm: a certain regular cadence, which is never boring, and capable of harmoniously linking classic compositions and cubist deconstructions, the work of architects from different cultures, talented and less so. Urbanity comes from the density of the urban fabric as well: the glimpses of the end of paths draw the eye discretely from the street to the back garden of the inner courtyard, the human scale (three or four stories), and finally the luminosity: high up, the pergolas shine in the sunlight and below is the sea. The robust urban structure appears to have preserved the quality of the public spaces, despite the decline and the densification of the second half of the twentieth century.

The first conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the city, whose surface alone has been damaged, works because it achieves an unusual synthesis between an architectural ensemble whose styles come from the Modern Movement, and a traditional urban plan inspired by the garden-cities. The next section attempts to pinpoint which historical and political processes led to this combination, and more particularly whether this arose from a consensus, as suggested by the publications on Tel Aviv, or on the contrary from tensions, as an architectural analysis of the buildings would imply.

The Producers of the City

The various archival sources consulted up to now (maps and blueprints, city periodicals, letters at the city engineering department and architectural publications)

[13] The term is taken from Patrick Geddes, *op. cit.*

identify three main clusters of producers: the city planners, the architects, and lastly, the city officials. The respective roles of these three groups of actors are described below.

Chronologically the first category is made up of the founding fathers and their 'consultants', the engineers Stiassny and Treudel ; secondly, the city planner-architects, like Richard Kaufmann, and thirdly, the biologist city planner Patrick Geddes. They all shared a vision of the first Jewish city in the modern world, the first urban Zionist settlement in Mandate Palestine. These visions should be paralleled to the urban utopias of the end of the 19th century and in particular with the garden-city idea. Although some of these visions remained on paper, others were approved by decision- making bodies and actually built, and, in some cases can still be seen in the city today. Their works are identifiable from the master plans and in reports which at times went with them, and can be studied in the cartography libraries of Israeli universities. To assess their impact on the city, we can compare the maps with the current land register, once drawn to the same scale.[14] The evidence can then be verified on the sites themselves to assess urban duration and validity.

The second category covers the city officials in municipal councils and the chief engineers. Their role in the building of the city can be pieced together from records of correspondence preserved in the Municipal Archives of Tel Aviv and above all from the monthly *The Tel Aviv Newsletter*[15] which was published from 1921 until the 1950s. In particular it contains the annual city reports, the minutes of different types of contacts with Europe (such as the chief engineers' study trips) and submittals to architectural competitions. Analysis of these archives shows that the second category played the key role in preserving the principles of the 1927 master plan and in particular the plot layout.

The third category covers the building designers. Most were educated in Europe and immigrated to Palestine, bringing with them their theoretical and practical backgrounds. The some four thousand buildings that still stand today in the heart of the city testify to their output, whereas the magazines *Building in the Near East* and *Building*,[16] published from 1934 to 1938, reflect their aspirations. A combined analysis of the sites and architectural writings, contrasting their theoretical ideas with the urban master plan established ten years earlier and considered to be a straightjacket that was irreconcilable with their rationalist ambitions, demonstrates that while forced to comply with its requirements, the architects of Tel Aviv created a simultaneously modern and urban architectural language. This was done in a remarkably homogeneous movement. The style of this architecture ended up by being so unanimously adopted in Tel Aviv that Israelis today view it as distinctive although the presence of similar styles in other cities in the Middle East, Damascus for instance, somewhat undermines this claim.

The Theoretical Debate

The questions raised and the debates that raged in the Hebrew-language magazines published by the *Circle of Architects* doubtless formed the theoretical basis that engendered the spatial vocabulary of Tel Aviv. These are presented here because they shed light on the period, and have never been published in French.

[14] This work was done at the CRFJ by Marjolaine Barazani.
[15] Yediot Iryat Tel Aviv.
[16] *Habinyan Bamisrah Hakarov* and *Habinyan*.

In a bohemian coffee house in Tel Aviv one evening in 1932, three architects argued until the wee hours over how to integrate avant-garde ideas into their building plans. Arieh Sharon, a former student of the Bauhaus school, Joseph Neufeld, from the Berlin firm of Erich Mendelsohn, and Ze'ev Rechter, a disciple of Le Corbusier, who had come from Paris, proclaimed themselves the "circle of architects". They were soon joined in their heated nocturnal debates by others: Carl Rubin, also from the Erich Mendelsohn firm, Sam Barkai, from the Le Corbusier school, Tchlenov, a student at the Beaux-Arts, and many young graduates of European schools of architecture. Their goal was to lead an "architectural revolt", i.e. to raise the standards of the spatial plans of the Jews of Palestine to the level of the Modern movement and turn their backs on the principles of traditional design. They infiltrated the established architectural corps, such as the Association of Architects and Engineers or city urban planning commissions, and their ideas spread via a publication edited by Julius Posner, the Palestine correspondent of the French magazine *l'Architecture aujourd'hui*. The influence of this magazine went even beyond their own hopes as can be seen by the magnificent villas that dotted the outskirts of Ramallah or Bethlehem built in the 1930s by the Arab bourgeoisie, who also adopted the avant-garde style.

Ten issues were first published with the title "*Building in the Near East, a Journal of the Circle of Architects in the Land of Israel*"[17]. This was followed by three special issues entitled *Building*.[18] Although it is difficult to link a specific theme to each issue, a chronological reading shows that the approach became more sharply defined from year to year. This chronology provides the key to deciphering the buildings.

1934: the question of style and organic architecture

The problems discussed in the magazine the first year deal primarily with the issue of finding a distinctive style: should they look locally or still draw their inspiration from other hot Mediterranean or tropical countries?

Previous types of architecture did not satisfy the aspirations of the new Jews of Palestine. The local Palestinian architecture was adapted to the lifestyle of the Arabs and not to those of Jewish immigrants from Europe and the architecture of the Jewish quarters built on the outside the walls of Jerusalem as of the second half of the nineteenth century was too similar to the ghettos of Eastern Europe. Most of these neighborhoods, like Mea Sha'arim in Jerusalem[19] were made up of blocks in which—buildings border the street, with a central communal courtyard where public amenities such as synagogues and schools are located. Starting in the 1910s and 1920s, architects were interested in creating a Jewish style, the *Hebrew Patriotic style*, in particular for the public buildings of *Ahuzat Bayit*. The Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium, built by Joseph Barsky, like the *Technion* in Haifa designed by Alexander Baerwald, combines inner spaces on the European model and Oriental architectural components, like domes, vaulted arches, flat roofs and decorative roof tiles. However this style did not convince the next generation. In his report published in 1925, Patrick Geddes notes that the architecture of the 1920s in Tel

[17] In December 1934, February, August, November and December 1935 and March, August and November 1936.
[18] *Construire. Urban Planning* was published in 1937, *Villas and Gardens* in November 1937 and *Villages of Palestine* in August 1938.
[19] Built in 1860.

Aviv "at first seems a mere medley, a struggle of individual fancies…"[20] Today this style is known to the Israelis as the "*eclectic style*."

One response came from Joseph Neufeld, who had worked with both Erich Menselsohn in Berlin and Bruno Taut in Moscow. Neufeld argued that the issue was not to ask whether to use bits and pieces from here and there but to design an 'organic' architecture.[21] Curiously, here the concept of organic architecture complements that of rationality, whereas elsewhere they are considered to be opposites. "Organic" is not used as it is normally to refer to unplanned growth comparable to the spread of a cancer, but rather to a perfect match between the shape of the human body and its functions. It is suggestive of the Jewish tradition, where the functioning of the human body and more generally all living things is considered to be an example of perfection itself, the product of the Creator. The sophisticated circumvolutions of an earlobe or the delicate configuration of a snail shell prove that there is no greater rationality than in the marvels of creation.[22] Was it because of their Jewishness (cultural and not religious) that these architects used the word 'organic' to describe an architecture known as rational or functional in Europe? Whatever the reason, the term was adopted to describe the architectural and urban approaches the circle of architects espoused. Neufeld made the supposition that there was a single architectural manifestation for all walks of life, habitat and work. He termed this manifestation 'organic' and noted that in all ages it had been called "beauty". He felt that this new, rational architecture should be termed "organic" rather than modern because the shapes derived from functions, as in the body, and were not dictated by a new fad destined to please merely because it differed from previous styles.

1935/1936: the urban question and the fantasy of the rational city

My first investigations in the city itself suggested that Tel Aviv's special quality could be attributed to the unusual association between avant-garde architecture and traditional city planning. Reading newspaper clippings published at the time of the exhibit *White City, International Style Architecture in Israel* and the conference on *International Style in Tel Aviv*[23] suggested that the architects of Tel Aviv had collaborated with town planning authorities to produce this urban fabric which is so distinctive yet so familiar. The articles that were published in 1935 in the *Circle of Architects* magazine show on the contrary that they were fiercely opposed to the traditionalism of the city plan. They complained that it would be impossible to express their aspirations and demanded it be modified. They not only wanted to redefine the already mapped -out undeveloped land; i.e. the land located between Allenby Street and the Yarkon River, but also to propose an entirely different concept for the lands destined for purchase, those located to the east of modern day Ibn Gavriol Street and to the north of the Yarkon River. They never refer to

[20] See Geddes, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[21] See Joseph Neufeld,("organic architecture"), *Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov* (Building in the Near East), December, 1934, p. 4.
[22] See Rav Abraham Karz. *Designer World*, GJBS, 1994.
[23] *Op.cit.*

the Scottish city planner Patrick Geddes, who today is considered nevertheless the emblematic figure of the urban history of Tel Aviv.[24]

As of its founding in 1921, the local Tel Aviv council envisaged reining in the wildly expanding development of the city and overseeing its growth. They wanted to use the talents of a renowned city planner, one sympathetic to the Zionist cause. The Scot Patrick Geddes, contacted initially in 1919 to review the plans for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was selected by mayor Meir Dizengoff to design a plan which would transform the small town of Tel Aviv, with its 30,000 inhabitants into a large urban metropolis with 100,000 inhabitants. In 1925, he presented his city plan for Jaffa- Tel Aviv, accompanied by a master plan for the vacant areas located to the north of the city. This plan was approved by the city in 1926, and ratified by the Central Committee for Urban Planning for Palestine in 1927. As a city planner, biologist, historian and sociologist, Geddes had a multidisciplinary education, a feature that was readily apparent in his way of approaching city planning. As a historian, Patrick Geddes integrated duration, the slow action of time on the shape of the city, as a positive given. He planned for the gradual fulfillment of his plan, alongside the expected growth of the city. As a biologist, he designed the city as a set of interactive components, structured in a hierarchy of networks around vital cores. He compared city growth to the circulation system. If the urban fabric is to expand without too much discontinuity, one must first develop poles of attraction which will then spread to the secondary blood vessels. For example, paved and nicely planted boulevards will attract buyers' attention and their buildings will then encourage purchases in the streets perpendicular to these roads. This system, associated with the obligation of each owner to build within a set period of time, helped avoid random building and hence economized on the cost of roadwork. At the same time, it created a cohesive urban fabric, which was one of Geddes' major aims. In the paper accompanying his plan for the city, he stressed the similarities between the Zionist movement and that of the garden cities. "All the world can see that Zionism stands for regional reconstruction, for a better combination of town and country..."[25] In a burst of lyricism, he cites the cult of fruit in Zionist thought and suggested that Tel Aviv become the symbol, by becoming the garden-city of fruit. The plan included a series of wide main roads oriented North-South, laid out close to each other, with smaller streets aligned East-West and set further apart. The intersection of these streets would create groups of small blocks, arranged around a central space for public facilities such as a nursery school, school or tennis court. He called this piece of urban fabrique a « block ». Geddes' plan incorporated some of the features of the garden city *Ahuzat Bayit*, such as limitations on construction to one- third of the lot, the hierarchy of the roads, greenery on the roads and the location of public buildings to mark perspective. More generally, he adopted the garden city model restriction of building one or two houses per lot, and the height of the buildings to two or three stories.[26] Above all, he preserved a clear-cut delineation of public, semi-private and private spaces. For Geddes, Tel Aviv would be urban.

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[24] Patrick Geddes is quoted only once in the entire set of articles, by Arieh Sharon in "The design of cooperative housing", in *Habinyan*, Vol 1, August 1937, p. 2.
[25] Patrick Geddes, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
[26] The three or four stories today were authorized by later modifications to Geddes' plan, discussed in the city council as of 1935, voted in 1938 and approved in 1940 by the British Mandate Government of

This plan was criticized by the *Circle* architects on two main points: the principle of division into lots, where each building is set on its own piece of land, and the alignment of the buildings along the streets. The 'block' arrangement, delineated by buildings whose doors opened onto the street, was challenged by these architects as a traditional city planning concept. "Every architect knows to what extent the buildings we construct, constrained by the present city plan, are far removed from our theoretical aspirations."[27] But what type of city planning were they after? A visit to certain neighborhoods of Haifa or the northern suburbs of Paris gives a better idea of the urban dream inspiring the Tel Aviv architects in the 1930s. They would have liked to design and construct rows of housing units set perpendicular to the streets and divided by wide expanses of green spaces facilitating the separation of the pedestrian and traffic flow, as Alexander Klein, the author of one of the urban plans for Haifa, describes in his article "Good plan, good housing."[28] Here again the "organic" concept is present: "Whereas the goal of the Jewish architects of *Eretz Israel*[29] is indeed to build good housing where people can live well, this can only be done in a city built in an organic fashion." Although on some points his statements are akin to the aspirations of Patrick Geddes, such as in particular the idea of a biological division of the city, similar to the veins of a living leaf, the plan he proposed departs from this radically. The housing units should face the green spaces and not the street, large empty spaces should be placed between buildings for "spiritual hygiene" and streets should be placed every 6 or 7 hundred meters. It would be out of question to plan boulevards, whose role is considered by Klein as ostentation. According to him, they are not adapted to children's games or to adult relaxation. A simple stroll down Rothschild or Ben Zion Boulevard in Tel Aviv today is however proof of the contrary. But rationalistic, "organic" city planning was then experiencing its hour of glory in Europe. As of 1925, Le Corbusier was working on his *Plan Voisin de Paris*, which included suggestions to demolish several old neighborhoods and monuments in the capital and build towers and rows arranged around green spaces. At the manifesto exhibit of the Werkbund in 1927, the presentation of the avant-garde quarter of Weissenhof had buildings set away from the streets (in particular the one by Mies van de Rohe).[30] The designs by Ludwig Hilberseimer illustrate the ideals of these planner-architects: his model for a social city of 500,000 inhabitants, presented in Stuttgart in 1927, shows a square plan composed of hundreds of rows of parallel housing units aligned perpendicular to the streets around a core formed of high-rise buildings arranged in "comb" surrounding skyscrapers In a similar spirit, Ernst May and Walter Gropius, two of the leaders of the Bauhaus school, built the *Seidlungen Praunheim* in Frankfurt and the *Dammerstock* in Karlsruhe in 1928.[31] In these projects, as in Alexander Klein's description, the land is no longer divided into plots each belonging to an owner but is presented as vast collective expanse, as a "white tablecloth" as Le Corbusier imagined. The layout of the buildings is not only

Palestine. See "Annual Report of the Tel Aviv Municipality for the years 1939/40" in *Yeditot Iryat Tel Aviv*, Vol 11: Geddes' Plan, paragraphs 7-9, 1940/41, p. 120.

[27] *Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov*, vol. 8, august 1936, p.9. For this note and the subsequent ones, translation from Hebrew by Sarah Gilboa Karni and Catherine Weill-Rochant.

[28] *Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov*, vol. 8, August 1936, pp. 2-3.

[29] Land of Israel.

[30] See Richard Pommer, Christian F. Otto, Weissenhof : *1927 and the Modern Movement in Architecture*, Chicago and London, the University of Chicago Press, 1991.

[31] Large housing projects.

dictated by the spatial constraints of history. The table can be placed according to the criteria of avant-garde architects who prided themselves on having provided a decisive response to the problems of societal change.

1936/1937: The Architectural Question or How to Deal with the Constraints of the Plan

The architects experimented with their research on large cooperative housing projects. The magazine *Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov* describes, as of the month of August 1935, the award winners of the contest "for the ideal apartment in a housing unit" organized by the Center of Workers' quarters of the *Histadrut* (labor union). It reproduces the winning plans. The first prize went to Ankstein-Baron, the second to Arieh Sharon, the author of an article entitled "The minimal apartment in residential buildings"[32]. In this article he first criticizes Arab architecture. He states that the niches and numerous corners produce too many broken lines, which are difficult to reconcile with a rational building. He also criticizes traditional city planning of streets and blocks as incompatible with the needs of the economy. In another article "The design of cooperative housing"[33] he states: "Cooperative housing is the opportunity to test the rational design of an ideal apartment for a worker family." He plans to create a symbiosis between modern architecture and the renewal of the Jewish people. He works on programs for workers' housing and also for kibbutz and hospitals, with the idea of best serving the social policy of the labor movement, whose priority is to guarantee livelihood, health care and decent minimal housing for all. The absence of status symbols in the façade, the simplicity of shapes, the communal rooftops and the collective facilities are all aspects of modern architecture that correspond to his ideology.

For the workers' cooperative housing projects he designed in Tel Aviv, he received a one-time authorization to group several lots, after having convinced the owners one by one of the worthiness of his plan.[34] The set of cooperative housing units on Frishman Street, built in 1934- 1936 include three blocks of buildings with three stories. In each group, the wings of the housing units are placed around a central courtyard which includes the shared facilities: the dining room, a laundry and a nursery. Access is through a monumental entrance, under a portico. The transversal layout of the apartments, the open façade stairwells and the large bay windows were designed for good ventilation of the unit. The architect was directly inspired by the buildings of the Bauhaus school, and in particular the "French" balconies which many architects of Tel Aviv such as Schmuel Barkai or Ze'ev Rechter also used.[35] The ideal apartment should be cool in summer and comfortably warm in winter. Given the lack of thermal insulation, the architect needed to use natural features such as the sun and the winds. The rooms facing the west are cooler in the morning, those which face east are better ventilated in the afternoon. This is why the living rooms face west and the bedrooms face east. In addition the east side heats less than the west side since the rising sun strikes the walls still chilled by the night air. But since the walls on the west side are heated by the afternoon sun, the living rooms need to

[32] *Habinjan Bamirah Hakarov*, Vol. 3, August 1935, pp. 6-7.
[33] *Habinjan*, Vol. 1, august 1937, pp. 1-3.
[34] See Arieh Sharon, *Kibbutz + Bauhaus, an Architect's Way in a New Land*, Stuttgart, Karl Krämer Verlag, Israel, Massada Publishing Ltd., 1976, p. 48.
[35] See buildings at 5, Engel Street and 84 Rothschild Boulevard.

be protected by large balconies. These were the type of considerations that guided the plans of the cooperative unit apartments. Because the apartments were aligned in long rows of buildings that the architects placed as a function of needs of orientation to the sun and the winds, without taking the streets into account, the goal of city planning and "organic" architecture was achieved: providing a clean and functional apartment, whose lines were regular and simple, which also reduced construction costs.

But for the other buildings, built on single, separate lots, the architects competed with each other in terms of ingenuity so that each room would have the optimal orientation: only by shifting forward and backwards or protruding could walls and other architectural figures attain some of the rational/organic goals put forward in the theories.

A comparative analysis of the buildings built in the 1930s and the theoretical texts of that period thus indicate that the urbanity of the buildings, observed and assessed on the sites, does not derive from compliance with the city plan and its traditional norms, but rather from an attempt to interject modernity where it had not been planned for. It further shows that this urbanity does not stem from a consensus, but on the contrary from tensions between the different groups of city producers: the architects were restricted or prevented from exercising city planning by the city officials and in particular by Schiffman, the chief engineer. His reports, published in the *Tel Aviv Newsletter*, indicate that he was notorious for the preservation of the pre-established urban layout: "We have seen in Tel Aviv very pretty little gardens stuck between buildings while vast stretches of land remain devoid of any trees or any vegetation. It is hence possible to imagine that a very high level of living can be created here despite the high density… I believe that we should continue to use the existing system, and simply introduce a few changes."[36]

The archives also reveal the contacts between the Jewish engineers and architects of Palestine and Europe. In 1935, a delegation from the *Circle of Architects* took part in the Third International Architecture Conference in central Europe. After the conference, they visited Budapest and Vienna where they were impressed in particular by the socialist buildings.[37] In 1937, Schiffman took part in the Urbanism and Architecture conference in Paris. After having taken part in a debate on the comparative values of high-density skyscrapers versus dispersed buildings, he formed the opinion that skyscrapers were not adapted to Tel Aviv. He was impressed by the talk by Raymond Unwin, the theorist of the garden cities and in particular by one of the ideas he expanded upon: planning on the national level should let regional councils handle the details. These regional councils could devolve local matters to city committees. It is easy to see the way this idea could resonate in the mind of the chief engineer of Tel Aviv, since the city authority was in the hands of Jews whereas the national authority was in the hands of the British. It is worth noting that the architects, in contrast to engineer Schiffman, never alluded to Britain, neither as regards garden cities nor through references to the city planner Patrick Geddes.

A key question that can now be raised is whether the architects also criticized the city plan as an emanation of Mandate power. What were the respective roles of the Jewish city authorities on the one hand and the national, i.e. Mandate, powers on the other in

[36] Y. Schiffman, "The question of the urban landscape of Tel Aviv" *Yediot Iryat Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv News) Vol. 6, January 1936, p. 388.
[37] See Samuel Barkai, The third international architecture conference in Central Europe" *Habinjan Bamissrah Hakarov*, Vol. 4, November 1935, p. 8.

terms of the expansion of Tel Aviv? In other words, what does a spatial analysis, either in the urban fabric or in the architectural shape tell us about these tensions between the powers in the pre-State period? The analysis of official records and correspondence between the Mandate authorities and Patrick Geddes[38], my research program for the year 2003, should shed light on this question.

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See Plates in the French section :

- *Plate A, p. 84: The garden City: Plans and Buildings*
- *Plate B, p. 86: The fantasy of the rational city and the persistance of traditional city planning*
- *Plate C, p. 90: "Organic" architectural projects*

[38] In the State Archives.